

STAT

WASHINGTON POST  
3 April 1987

# Soviet Diplomats Ousted After French Spy Arrests

J By Edward Cody  
Washington Post Foreign Service

PARIS, April 2—France ordered the expulsion of three Soviet diplomats today after breaking up a space technology spy ring said to involve several French officials, the Russian-born wife of one of them and his jealous Romanian mistress.

The expulsion order came at a particularly delicate time for Prime Minister Jacques Chirac. He returned from Washington earlier today and is planning to visit the Soviet Union next month in another high-exposure trip possibly meant to enhance his reputation as a statesman for next spring's presidential campaign.

Against that background, the Foreign Ministry communique did not name the three diplomats being expelled and made no reference to the spy ring uncovered three weeks ago by the Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire, or DST, the French internal security police.

The Interior Ministry said the ring appeared primarily interested in technology used in some motors for the French rocket Ariane, operated to lift satellites into space in association with the European Space Agency.

Following tradition, the Foreign Ministry gave the reason for expelling the Soviets only as "activities unconnected to their mission and their status."

Foreign Minister Jean-Bernard Raimond, who had accompanied Chirac to Washington, summoned Soviet Ambassador Yakov Riabov this afternoon to hand over the expulsion order, giving the diplomats eight days to leave France, the ministry said. Only a few days ago,

Riabov had told French reporters there was nothing to the espionage allegations that had been widely reported in the media here.

French press reports, quoting security police officials, said the espionage effort was run by Maj. Valery Konorev, listed at the Soviet Embassy as air attache but described as an agent of the Soviet military intelligence organization GRU. Le Monde, France's leading daily, said Konorev was identified as a military intelligence agent on his arrival in September 1985.

The Soviet news agency Tass quoted Konorev in an interview in Paris yesterday as saying the French charges are a fabrication. The Tass dispatch described the arrests as part of a "hostile campaign" inspired by "certain circles" trying to undermine confidence in the Soviet Union after recent Soviet proposals to eliminate U.S. and Soviet intermediate-range missiles in Europe.

On March 16, after arresting five French men and two East European-born women, French police charged that they had sought "in-

formation, objects, documents or processes, the gathering and use of which could harm national defense."

Pierre Verdier, allegedly the spy network's leader, was an official at the Rouen district office of the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies.

Another Frenchman charged in the case, Michel Fleury, also worked at the statistics institute's Rouen office and was a classmate of Verdier at the Ecole Polytechnique, France's elite engineering school.

The Societe Europeenne de Pro-

pulsion manufactures advanced engines fueled by liquid hydrogen and oxygen for Ariane 4 and Ariane 5 rockets at a factory near Rouen, about 90 miles northwest of Paris.

Verdier last July married a third alleged member of the group, Lyudmilla Varygin, a Russian, after meeting her during a visit to Moscow. Verdier's lawyer told reporters the marriage upset Antonetta Manole, a Romanian-born naturalized Frenchwoman who was a secretary at the statistics institute's Rouen office and who the lawyer said had been Verdier's mistress until he met and married Varygin.

As a result, according to this account, Manole denounced Verdier and the others in a letter to Chirac that was turned over to the security police for investigation. Lawyers for Verdier and his wife have dismissed Manole's allegations as an invention.

The last known expulsion of Soviet diplomats from France occurred in February 1986, when four were sent home after a former non-commissioned officer in the French Army was charged with handing over military information to Soviet military intelligence agents. In retaliation, four French diplomats were expelled from the Soviet Union.